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RUFOADA/JAC MOLESWORTH RAF MOLESWORTH UK PRIORITY
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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 02 ANKARA 000386

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SUBJECT: IRAQI VP ABDEL MAHDI ASKS FOR TURKEY'S SUPPORT

ANKARA 00000386 001.3 OF 002

Classified By: POL/C Janice G. Weiner for reasons 1.4 (bgsgdiscuss Turkey's concerns on PKK and Kirkuk with Barzani and Talabani; acknowledged Turkish concerns on the constitution; and reported near-GOI consensus on the hydrocarbons law. End summary.

¶2. (C) Iraqi Vice President Adel Abdel Mahdi visited Turkey Feb. 20-22, and met with PM Erdogan and FonMin Gul. As with VP Hashimi's visit last month, PM Erdogan sent his private Gulfstream jet to transport Abdel Mahdi. GOT Special Envoy for Iraq Celikkol told the Ambassador prior to the visit that Turkey wanted to demonstrate that it is reaching out beyond Iraq's Sunni Arab population, and that it wants to put behind it bad relations with the Iraqi Shias following a controversial Sunni Arab NGO conference held in Istanbul last December.

¶3. (SBU) The Turkish media reported that President Sezer refused to meet Abdel Mahdi, but Celikkol's deputy, Murat Ozcelik, insisted to us that this was strictly a scheduling conflict. Indeed, Ozcelik said, Sezer did receive Abdel Mahdi in Dec. 2005. (We checked; he did.)

¶4. (S) According to Ozcelik, Abdel Mahdi told Gul that any neighbors meeting (or neighbors plus P5/G8) should support the GOI and "not leave Iraq alone to face the violence." Abdel Mahdi reportedly added that good relations with Turkey are important for Iraq; a negative approach from Turkey "scares us." The Iraqi VP claimed that Iraq's Arab neighbors essentially abandoned the country -- he asserted that only Iran, Turkey and Saudi Arabia have been supportive. Celikkol told the DCM Feb. 22 that Mahdi complained that the Arab states are demanding Iraq scrap its constitution and start from scratch. Gul responded that Turkey does not seek this, but Iraq should consider constitutional changes that will address the concerns of the Sunni Arab community. Constitutions must change with the times and with new circumstances, Gul continued; Celikkol asserted that Mahdi did not object to this.

¶5. (S) Gul responded that the neighbors want to help, and that one of the chief purposes of an enlarged neighbors meeting would be to demonstrate support for the GOI. Gul

emphasized that Turkey does not want to dictate solutions to Iraq. Instead, the GOT's goal is to focus the neighbors on concrete steps to help the Iraqi government and people. Abdel Mahdi appreciated this.

¶6. (C) Celikkol told the DCM that Abdel Mahdi seemed to Quk to d indeed asked for Turkey to support the GOI's search for consensus on the issue. Celikkol asserted that the two Iraqi Vice Presidents will now work within the GOI in a constructive way on both Kirkuk and PKK. Ozcelik told us separately that Abdel Mahdi was pleased that PM Erdogan recently told the press that he favors GOT contacts with the Iraqi Kurds.

¶7. (C) Abdel Mahdi reportedly told Gul that the GOI has almost entirely reached consensus on the hydrocarbons law. He said the law will give the KRG authority to negotiate some deals, but in essence the central government will be in control of these resources and revenues.

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ANKARA 00000386 002.3 OF 002

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